An essential part of Plan’s work is to help create spaces for children and young people to discuss together the issues which affect their lives, then ensure adults respect their views so that children may be involved in community decision-making. This communication has been prepared with and by children directly and is intended to give a general sense of the kinds of issues children discuss and how they work together.

Dear Sponsor,

Greetings from Brazil! We do not know what you think about our country or if you have had the opportunity to visit any region. Many things are disseminated about our land, but are not. Through this document we want to talk a little about what has been happening here. However, we will not be locked to the everyday issues that we encounter everyday, the difficulties of our communities, we want to talk about things that have made a difference in people’s lives, changing our thoughts, because are eager to see the families from our communities living a better future.

Building Youth Empowerment

During centuries peoples judged us as incapable of making decisions, as if we were not able to achieve great results and give opinions on elaborated situations of facts. Luckily that has changed considerably, but we still have a long path forward. Various Organizations and Institutions have risen to fight for our rights, to show that we are capable and that we will contribute for the development of our city, state and country.

This is real and has happened consistently! We, adolescents, have been able to participate in decisions that are important to us and that can change the future. Thus, there is no one better than us, children and adolescents, to understand and know what is best for us. The most rewarding is that people already recognize us as subjects of rights, and they are changing their view about us. Today, they stop to listen to our ideas and opinions and the way we feel and live things before making final decisions.

Within this context, we wish to talk about the opportunity the civil society Organizations and even governmental entities are offering to each one of us to participate in spaces where we can discuss public policies and advocate for our rights. Brazil already has forums, councils and other entities that have opened spaces and booked chairs to include children and adolescents in the decision making process. We can mention the Municipal, State and National conferences for the rights of children and adolescents in which we were able to see, criticize and reach decisions in major country strategic planning.

Making Decisions
Therefore, during several months, children and adolescents who are part of projects from Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations that promote projects and programs in favour of the children rights attended meetings, workshops and Seminars regarding matters related to the children Rights Convention, Human Rights Decree and the Children and Adolescent Statute in order to contribute with the discussions carried out throughout the conferences. We, children from the projects that Plan implements in various cities of Maranhão, are some of those adolescents who were instructed and elected to participate in those conferences. We are already active participants in our cities, but then we were chosen to be part of the State Conferences, and finally, a group of 6 adolescents from Plan’s projects were invited to go to Brasilia, capital of the country, to participate on the 9th National Conference for Children and Adolescent rights, held from the 11th to the 15th of July.

“It is amazing all the effort Plan puts on to have the participation of the youth in the Public Policies discussions, once it is stated in the ECA (Children and Adolescents Statute). And, if we analyze, it is much more than a simple participation; because it is a way to exercise our citizenship, because after events such as this we, adolescents, do not think of our rights only for ourselves, but for a group of people; because when we go there we feel that we are representing everyone.”

Nicole, 16, from Peritoró.

The highlight of the National conference was that we helped on the Elaboration of the Decennial Plan for the Human Rights of Children and Adolescents, in which we defined the axis to promote and protect those rights; and also the lines of work that will deal with Social Control, Protagonism and Participation of children and Adolescents, and the National Management Plan for the Children and Adolescents Human Rights Policies. Our next endeavor is to closely follow up the actions after the conference and to socialize the information with our friends at school and within the projects we participate. We will also increase our participation and the participation of adolescents in Rights Councils, trying to advocate in all forms and manners in order to achieve the goals drawn from the Decennial Plan.

“As a protagonist of our own history, I want to cascade this range of possibilities that was presented to me during the conference, even if I cannot fully participate; I want to somehow help the generation that is coming and that is rising strong in order to reach their full potential in a society that will hold a decennial Plan for the Rights of Children and Adolescents that I helped to develop; and I wish that they fight to conquer new achievements, because fighting for those rights is also our right.”

Nicole, 16, Peritoró/MA – Part of the letter written by the adolescent after coming back from the National Conference for the rights of Children and Adolescents.